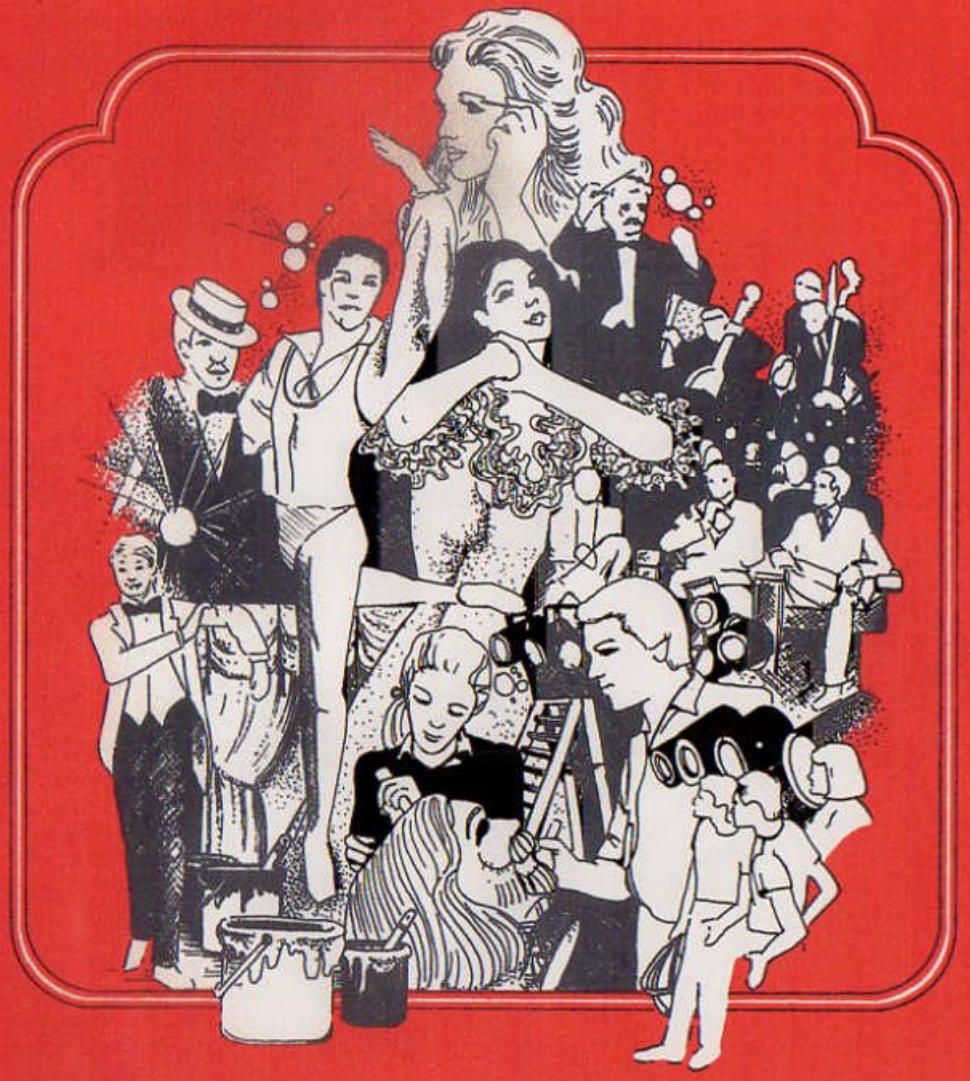
NOVEMBER 1985
OKLAHOMA

INTIMATE
THEATRE



North London's Premier Theatre
Intimate by Name, Intimate by Nature

SHAKESPEARE AS EALING COMEDY

Eric Shorter

Tourism may give the British theatre a boost at the box office but every shopkeeper knows it is the regular customer who counts. To count on foreign visitors to maintain a nation's dramatic tradition sounds risky.

But where would the Royal Shakespeare Company be at Stratford-on-Avon without Americans? To hear an English accent except on opening nights is as rare as revivals of Shakespearean tragedy ("Othello" has just proved the exception to that rule).

It is the same in Shaftesbury Avenue. Audiences appear to be composed largely of tourists, some of whom understand English better than others, few of whom appreciate its nuances and niceties.

They applaud. They laugh. They can tell when they are meant to. And because very often the seats they occupy were reserved months earlier by the travel agent so that English theatregoing has been built into their "package", they may not have actually chosen the play they are at or have wanted in their hearts even to go to a play. They are presumed to expect to see a play or several plays while they are in Britain. So a minority (or majority?) find themselves facing Shakespeare whether they want to or not.

Like for example the restless and mumbling American next to me at Stratford-on-Avon during the "The Merry Wives of Windsor". He was with his wife and it was obvious that although they finally derived some fun from a revival which was set in more or less modern times, like some Ealing comedy in which every actor could do his own quirky thing, the doings on stage were (to them) a bit of a blur.

For a start the husband kept commenting out loud. In one of this season's Stratford programmes where the director asks spectators not to take photographs or wear hats and so on he adds his horror of whispering during the performance.

This wasn't whispering. It was plain and very audible talk; and by paying more attention to it than the actors (because its distracting powers were more dramatic) I learned that it was a sort of translation.

Not continuous but intermittent. The translation was for the benefit of his wife who sounded constantly at sea. When remonstrated with, her husband turned to ask "Is this the best you've got?" Meaning the best "we" could offer of Shakespeare.

1985 No.45

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It was hardly the moment to explain that the farce had never been supposed as entirely Shakespeare's but that it had a way of disproving the loftiest critical sneers, because it "played" so well and that, like "The Taming of the Shrew", which is also sneezed at in highbrow quarters but usually gives more pleasure in performance than you would suspect from reading it . . .

All one could pray was that after the remonstration the simultaneous translation would be toned down; and that if so little fun was being had there was the interval to look forward to and the chance for the visitors of a mannerly escape.

Anyone who knew the play would understand why so much of it was passing over the American's wife's head. It passes over all heads sometimes. This is one reason probably why it had been scenically updated. The costumes and customs of the Fifties or of the so-called New Elizabethans exercised a charm of their own — at least for Britons.

And for many of us, other than baffled visitors from overseas, it was good that the production had discovered another idiom because the dialogue, if heeded unduly, might be impenetrable. In other words, what we couldn't grasp of the text we could grasp from the detailed and inventively comical incongruity of the characterisations.

Critically speaking, the thing was a cop-out. A dodge. An evasion. A gimmick to mask the fact that to have played the farce in contemporary costume and settings — that is, the era in which it was written — would have challenged the company beyond its capacity.

Sceptical playgoers who suppose that the reason for modern dress is to make it easier for the actors to know, for example, where to put their hands (in pockets, puffing pipes or holding handbags) were confirmed in their suspicion that latter-day manners are easier to represent effectively than those of the past, especially the distant past.

And I think that is what those Americans sensed. He kept describing (for our row of the stalls to hear) the atmosphere as that of a British television sit-com of the style exported years since to the United States; and his perception was not far wrong. That is why the actors seemed so much at home. They could think themselves back to 1959 more neatly and amusingly than to 1599.

Yet for me, the updating worked a treat. It brought out the best in the RSC which has a way of making more of the lesser plays (like "Comedy of Errors", "Love's Labour's Lost" and "Two Gentlemen of Verona") than of the greater.

The charm came from the clash of style between the post-war British costumes, attitudes, manners and Shakespeare's (or mainly Shakespeare's) language. To have suited the Americans it should perhaps have been transplanted to Brooklyn or Idaho; and of course they had a point.

Like the critic Herbert Farjeon, who reviewing the same play 60 years ago declared: "If we are to have Shakespeare in modern dress, with telephones and cocktails and golf clubs obbligati (itals), then the only thing to do is to rewrite the plays."

I see the logic but doubt the benefit. I don't doubt that those Americans would agree with him.

INTIMATE THEATRE

Green Lanes, Palmers Green, London N13 4DH
01-886 5451 Box Office 01-882 5795 Manager

Bob Dixon writes ...

OKLAHOMA! is certainly one of the most popular musicals with our audiences and this week we look forward to E.L.O.D.S.' presentation of this great musical. We wish the company a successful show and a pleasant and enjoyable week with us.
Panto time is almost with us again and this year our panto **SNOW WHITE** will be the best yet. Children and parents alike always have a super time at the panto so book now and don't be disappointed.
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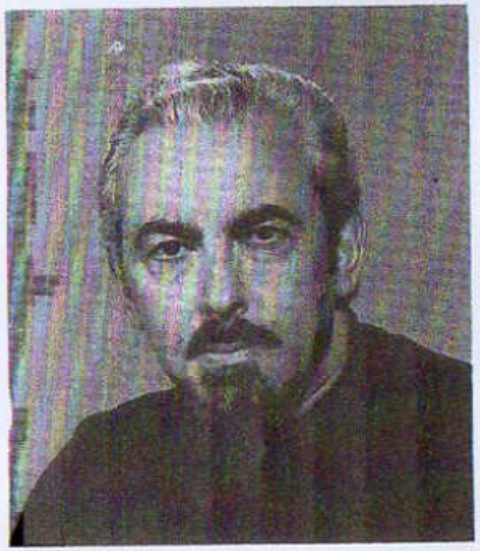

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from *Playschool*
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INTIMATE THEATRE

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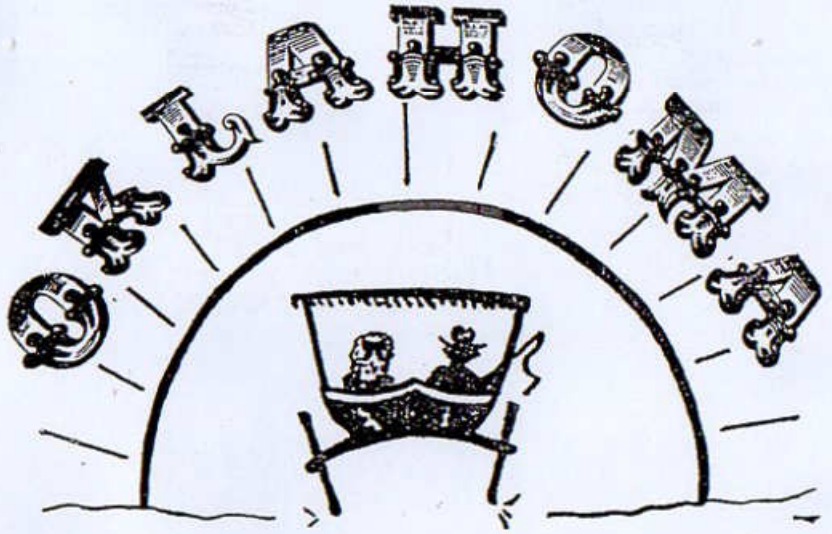

A Musical Play by **RICHARD RODGERS** and **OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II**
Based on **LYNN RIGGS'** "Green Grow the Lilacs"

Tuesday, 12th November to Saturday, 16th November, 1985

Director: **DORA BASHAM**
Musical Director: **ALLY KESSLER**
Choreographer: **ANN HERTLER-SMITH**

OKLAHOMA!

was first produced by The Theatre Guild on April 1st, 1943, at the St James Theatre, New York City, and in London it was first produced at The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on April 30th, 1947.

Characters (in order of appearance)

Aunt Eller	**GRETA JENKINS**
Curly	**MARK BORDELL**
Laurey	**JEAN STREETON**
Ike Skidmore	**ANTHONY GOLDING**
Fred	**RICHARD BODEK**
Slim	**HOWARD WRIGHT**
Will Parker	**PAUL CODY**
Jud Fry	**PAUL CONNER**
Ado Annie Carnes	**SALLY PEARSON**
Ali Hakim	**KEITH TAYLOR**
Gertie Cummings	**KATIE GOLDING**
Ellen	**CAROLINE CODY**
Faye	**SARAH McLINTOCK**
Vivienne	**LIS HATTON**
Andrew Carnes	**GEOFF KNIGHT**
Cord Elam	**JAMES INWOOD**
Dream Ballet Laurey	**JULIA HARRIS**
Dream Ballet Curly	**PETER MOLES**

CHORUS & DANCERS
JULIA BALLA, VAL CLARKE, SUSAN COLLINGS, LES COOPER, JOANNE DENNISON, MIKE GILBERT, MARJORIE HANSON, JULIA HARRIS, KEVIN HOLYER, ELSPETH LINDSEY, CAROLINE MABEY, DOREEN MAGEE, CURT MASON, ALF MOUSLEY, DIANE PADLEY, SALLY PASCOE, VICKI PATRICK, JOANNA PEARCE, KAY PERVERSI, JANET SINFIELD

SCENES:

ACT I
Scene I The Front of Laurey's Farmhouse
Scene II The Smoke House
Scene III The Front of Laurey's Farmhouse

ACT II
Scene I The Skidmore Ranch
Scene II The Front of Laurey's Farmhouse

Time: Just after the turn of the century
Place: Indian Territory (Now Oklahoma)

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I
Scene 1

Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'	Curly
The Surrey with the Fringe on Top	Curly, Laurey, Aunt Eller
Kansas City	Will, Aunt Eller, and the Boys
I Cain't Say No	Ado Annie
Many a New Day	Laurey and the Girls
It's a Scandal! It's a Outrage!	Ali Hakim and the Boys
People Will Say We're in Love	Curly and Laurey

Scene 2

Pore Jud	Curly and Jud
Lonely Room	Jud

Scene 3

Out of My Dreams	Laurey and the Girls

ACT II
Scene 1

The Farmer and the Cowman	Carnes, Aunt Eller, Curly, Will Ado Annie, Slim and Ensemble
All er Nuthin'	Ado Annie, Will
Reprise: People Will Say We're in Love	Curly and Laurey

Scene 2

Oklahoma!	Curly, Laurey, Aunt Eller, Ike, Fred and Ensemble
Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'	Laurey, Curly and Ensemble
Finale	Entire Company

E.L.O.D.S.' next production:

The Mikado

BY GILBERT AND SULLIVAN

Spring 1986

If you wish to join us as an active member or become a Friend of Enfield Light please contact: Keith Taylor on 01-360 7875

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"OKLAHOMA!"

Director	**Dora Basham**
Musical Director	**Ally Kessler**
Choreographer	**Ann Hertler-Smith**
Orchestra	**Students from Middlesex Polytechnic**
Orchestral Secretary	**Martha Kessler**
Rehearsal Pianist	**Mark Newport**
Stage Manager	**Frank Bundle**
Lighting	**Gradav**
Set	**Derek Basham & Members of the Society**
Costumes	**Stageplay Ltd/A. & C. Maldorf, St Albans**
Wardrobe Mistress	**Katie Golding**
Props	**Jill Rout**
Prompt	**Evelyn Wilkinson**
House Manager/Ticket Sec.	**Basil Gathergood**
Front of House Photographs	**Harry Green**

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BOB DIXON
Sincere thanks to our Front of House Staff

E.L.O.D.S.

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	Howard Wright

PAST PRODUCTIONS

1953 Trials by Jury
1954 HMS Pinafore
1955 The Gondoliers
1956 Iolanthe, Patience
1957 The Mikado
1958 Yeomen of the Guard
1959 Trial by Jury
1960 Pirates of Penzance
1961 The Gondoliers, Gypsy Baron
1962 Iolanthe
1963 HMS Pianfore
1964 Brigadoon
1965 The Mikado
1966 La Belle Hélène, Trial by Jury
1967 Ruddigore
1968 Lilac Time, Music Hall
1969 Yeomen of the Guard, Music Hall
1970 Merrie England, Me and My Girl
1971 Orpheus in the Underworld
Gilbert & Sullivan Concert
Music Hall
1972 Brigadoon
Gilbert & Sullivan Concert
The Boyfriend
1973 Oklahoma!, The Mikado
1974 The Pajama Game, Salad Days
1975 Fiddler on the Roof
How to Succeed in Business
Without Really Trying
1976 Music Hall, Iolanthe
1977 Flappers and Flannels
Maid of the Mountains
1978 Oh! What a Lovely War
Orpheus in the Underworld
1979 Free as Air, The Arcadians
1980 Music Hall, Cabaret
1981 Carousel, Call Me Madam
1982 Sweet Charity, The Card
1983 Memories, The Gondoliers
1984 States Alive, Fiddler on the Roof
1985 The Sorcerer

THE GARBO OF THE STAGE

Patrick Ludlow

Does the name of Lily Elsie conjure up the clop-clop of the hansom, the ladies of Leicester Square, shirtfronts and sables? Did Grandad ever tell you how, when he'd had a drop too much, he was dropped from the top of Leicester Lounge by two flunkeys and caught by two others at the bottom; dusted down — and sent on his way?

Maybe you have to hear the magic title 'The Merry Widow' before you start humming the lovely waltz by Franz Lehar — and want to dance.

Lily Elsie was never less than a leading lady. Born in 1886 her first job was in 1898 at the Queens Theatre, Manchester, playing the title role in 'Red Riding Hood'. On the halls, touring the regions, she was known as Little Elsie. I'm not sure what she did, probably sang and danced, but if they didn't like you then they dropped the curtain on you and on with the next act.

Lily was perfect for pantomime and children's plays; and it was in one of these that George Edwardes (the Guv'nor) saw her and placed her under contract. That was in 1905, two years before she created her furore at Daly's.

It's hard to explain how gigantic that furore was. Remember there were none of those sidelines then like films, TV, and broadcasting. Nothing to detract from the coverage in all those papers, periodicals, and magazines. And Lily, lacking the brashness of former musical comedy performers, brought to London a style that was new: quiet, restrained, and ladylike. Which was how the men liked to picture their women — and the way the girls liked to mirror themselves.

Moreover there was that marvellous title (the dawn of women's lib) which implied freedom to disport an ankle; and, in the most reserved manner, go to town.

All England went mad about that title. There were Merry Widow receptions, dinners, dances (with the waltz played time and time again). Trade cashed in (how commerce follows art) for there were Merry Widow hats, gowns, gloves, and even corsets. Above all Miss Elsie spoke, sang, and danced divinely. Again it was a simply topping piece with a ripping cast of supporting players which included that charmer Joe Coyne as Danilo and the inimitable George Graves perfect as Baron Popoff.

Of course the press made much play with headlines like: A STAR IN A NIGHT. All rot. She'd had seven years experience in the theatre, and on the halls, before her two years arduous training under the Guv'nor where besides studying her elocution, singing and dancing, she had to understudy and, at short notice, go on for the sick chorine or a leading part.

So when her chance came her performance never deteriorated, as with some of our lesser trained artistes today, and her acclamation grew and grew. But success of that stature is hard to carry. Where could they find another 'Merry Widow' for her with a title that led to so much chat? George Edwardes almost achieved it: 'The Dollar Princess'.

It was another money spinner but it lacked the charm of 'The Widow' and Lily's part wasn't so endearing. Then Miss Elsie vanished — removed her name from stage reference books — and vanished. Certainly Cupid took a hand in this; still her retirement was a grevious loss.

George Graves went on playing in 'The Widow' for ages. He was in the next notable revival in '23, again at Daly's, and it's pertinent to note that there it was the heartthrob Carl Brisson who made the hit as Danilo. That production, under the management of George Graves, toured and then returned to the Lyceum.

George was always on the trot with his widow. There can't be many places they missed. But they were back in town in the 30's at the Hippodrome; and in the 40's George teamed up with that clever couple Cyril Ritchard (Danilo) and Madge Elliott (Sonia) and they graced His Majesty's and the Coliseum.

Among the countless revivals, all over the world, no Sonia ever made the impact of Lily Elsie in 1907. A decade later she reappeared in London at a time when many preferred to be out of town. Certainly the Kaiser's raids couldn't compete with those of Mr Hitler but they could be nasty and the one I most vividly recall was a daylight foray.

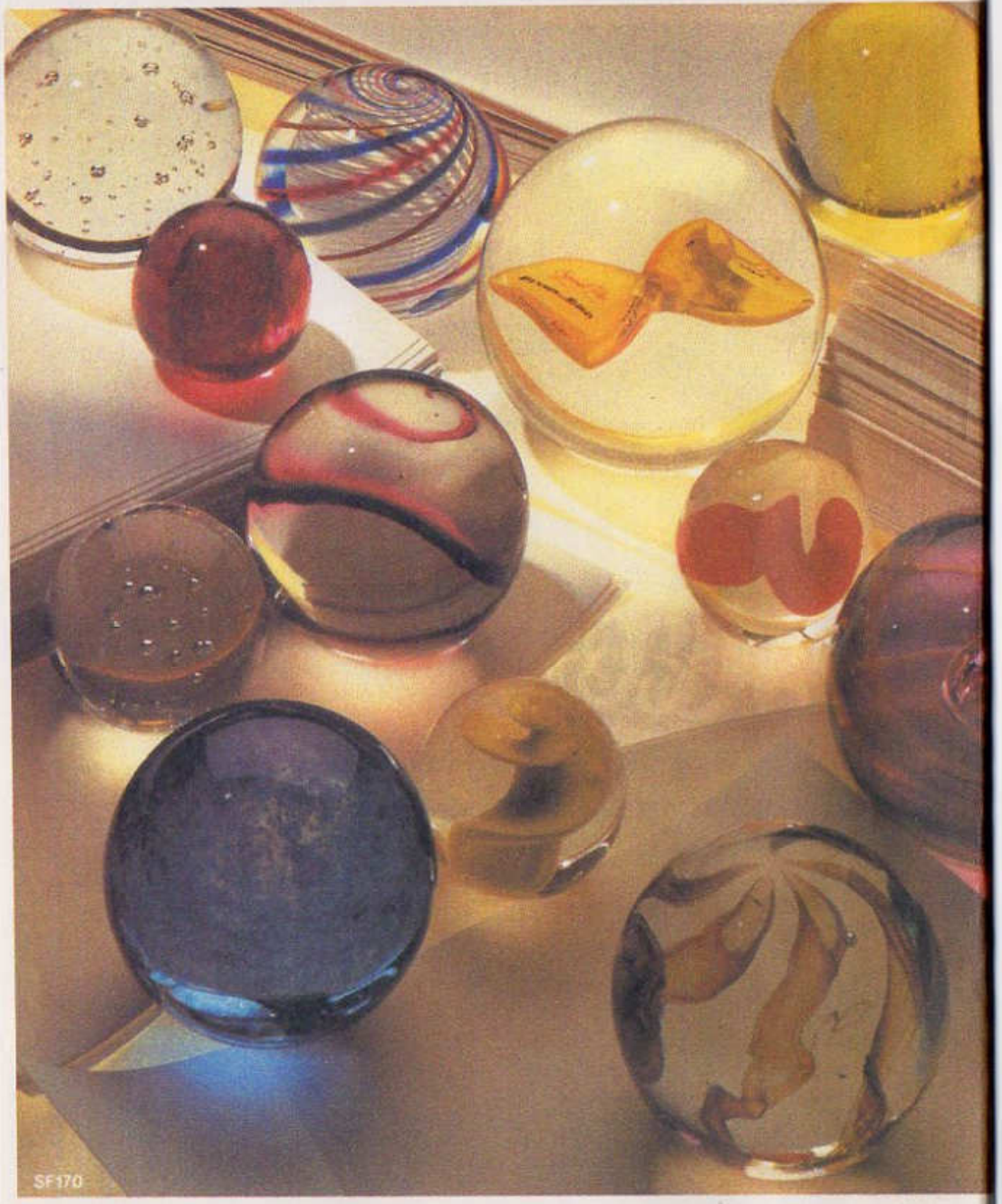
My splendid view was from the open top of a moving 27 bus. They came over unchallenged in perfect formation flaunting their iron crosses. And I remember the conductor's comment: 'If the Kaiser thinks 'e can come over 'ere wivout payin' 'is fare — 'e's got another think comin''.

Miss Elsie's return was in a musical play called 'Pamela'; and Sir Alfred Butt, who then had the Palace, was responsible for the exciting event. With her was the Adonis Owen Nares who hated every moment of it for he was essentially a straight actor. And an excellent one both in comedy and tragedy.

My, what a good looking couple they were. But musical plays (as opposed to musical comedies) seldom stir the town and their 178 performances were due more to the stars than the piece; and, soon after that, our Garbo of the theatre vanished once more.

After another decade she came back in a very good little comedy which might have been by Noél Coward but was in fact the work of Ivor Novello who played opposite her. Again she made a great success proving her worth in the light satirical. By this time she was all of 40 — and more beautiful than ever. She was certainly lovelier than when I saw her as Pamela in '17.

Then, after delighting the regions for a while, she vanished for the last time. At her memorial service, some ten years ago, in that charming little Farm Street Church, it was good to hear that her benevolence equalled her beauty.



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